



## Utah Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health

### Press Release

March 20, 2008

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### *Utah Towns Attack Underage Drinking*

SALT LAKE CITY UT- Twenty-eight town hall meetings will be held statewide with the intent to decrease underage drinking. During the months of March through May, teenagers throughout Utah are engaged in spring break vacations, proms, and graduation parties. This is a critical time to focus on underage drinking.

Utah views underage drinking as a serious issue. In September 2006, the Utah Legislature funded a media campaign called *ParentsEmpowered.org* which was designed to prevent and reduce underage drinking in Utah by providing parents with information about the harmful effects of alcohol. Underage drinking is not isolated to just college or high school age youth. According to a recent survey (R&R Partners) almost 59 percent of Utah parents are unaware that sixth graders are drinking. In addition, 31 percent of kids who said they had been drunk last year, had parents who believed their children were non-drinkers.

Utah also utilizes data collected from a statewide survey called the Utah Student Health and Risk Protection Survey (SHARP) to assess adolescent substance use. According to the 2007 SHARP, approximately 23 percent of surveyed eight-graders have sampled alcohol. By the time they graduate from high school, nearly 38 percent of Utah kids will have experimented with alcohol.

Utah has some of the strictest laws in the nation regarding the consumption of alcohol and clearly prohibits retail alcohol sales to minors. Perhaps the most important change that needs to be made is in our own attitudes about underage drinking. Communities need parents to communicate clear rules and expectations about alcohol consumption to their children. "We let parents know that if a child gets through age 21 without smoking, abusing alcohol or using illegal drugs then he/she will probably never use those substances," said Ben Reaves Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Prevention Program Manager.

Alcohol use threatens the safe and healthy development of more young people than any other substance – even more than tobacco and illicit drugs. Utah's Town Hall Meetings are part of the national effort to increase understanding and awareness of underage drinking and its consequences, and encourage individuals, families, and communities to address the problem. On

March 10, 2008, Cedar City held the first of the scheduled Utah Town Hall Meetings on Underage Drinking and had 950 people in attendance.

The general public is welcomed to attend upcoming town hall meetings to learn more about the new research on underage drinking, and discuss how their community can develop strategies to prevent underage alcohol use. People are encouraged to visit the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health website [www.dsamh.utah.gov](http://www.dsamh.utah.gov) and [parentsempowered.org](http://parentsempowered.org) to view the current town hall meetings schedule.

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